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Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women**

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report summarizes the situation of Palestinian women between October 2004 and September 2005, in reference to Economic and Social Council resolution 2005/43 of 26 July 2005. It reviews the situation of women and provides an overview of the assistance provided to Palestinian women by entities of the United Nations system, inter alia with regard to economic activities, humanitarian assistance, education and training, health, and the human rights of women. The report concludes with recommendations for consideration by the Commission on the Status of Women.

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** The submission of the present report was delayed due to the need for consultation with relevant departments.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 2005/43, the Economic and Social Council, concerned about the grave deterioration of the situation of Palestinian women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, requested the Secretary-General to continue to review the situation and to assist Palestinian women by all available means, and to submit to the Commission on the Status of Women at its fiftieth session a report, including information provided by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution.

2. The present report covers the period from October 2004 to September 2005. The first part of the report reviews the situation of Palestinian women based on information from United Nations bodies or individuals that monitor the situation of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. Such bodies and individuals include the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since 1967, and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences.

3. The second part of the report reflects information submitted by entities of the United Nations system that provide assistance to Palestinian women, including the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Public Information, the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), ESCWA, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV) and the World Bank.

4. The report also provides recommendations aimed at improving the situation of Palestinian women, including through the continued assistance of the United Nations system.

II. Situation of Palestinian women

5. Despite a period of relative calm from February to August 2005 which marked the evacuation of Israeli settlers from the Gaza strip,[1] the majority of Palestinian women and children continued to suffer the consequences of the conflict and restrictions of access (E/ICEF/2005/P/L.29, para. 34). Poverty and unemployment persist in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (E/CN.4/2005/29, para. 8) and human rights violations in the form of violence against women are pervasive (E/CN.4/2005/72/Add.4, p. 2). An increasing number of families have exhausted the means that enabled them to cope with the crisis over the past five years and face difficulties in meeting their basic needs. This negative trend is a major source of stress and anxiety for a population already weakened by years of violence, isolation, movement restrictions and severe economic decline. As a result, women and their families suffer chronic insecurity.[2]

6. The *Palestine Human Development Report 2004*[3] emphasized that development was not possible without women's participation. It highlighted the growing concern about the existing gap between women and men in terms of opportunities, choices and living conditions.[4] The report highlighted the limited participation of women in the official development process, the job market and in decision-making processes in public institutions.[5] The Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences attributed the increasing inequality of women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory to a double system of subordination, that is occupation and patriarchy, which was sustained through multiple forms of direct and indirect violence inside and outside the home (E/CN.4/2005/72/Add.4, para. 47).

7. The Special Rapporteur reported that women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory are killed or threatened with death for tarnishing family honour. Women's transgressions of socially expected behaviours, derived from prevailing patriarchal norms and standards, are believed to violate the "honour" of men and the family and legitimize violence against women as a disciplinary measure to maintain or restore family honour. Women accused of promiscuity may be imprisoned in their homes, subjected to verbal and physical violence, married to their violator or even murdered in the name of honour (Ibid., para. 56).

8. The patriarchal biases prevailing in the legal provisions and criminal justice system prevent women from accessing justice and escaping violence (Ibid., para. 60). The Personal Status laws that regulate women's rights and roles within the family in the Occupied Palestinian Territory are not unified. For example, Muslim women in the West Bank are subject to Jordanian law; those in the Gaza are subject to Egyptian law; and Christian Palestinians are subject to laws established by their respective churches (Ibid., para. 60 (a)).

9. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences welcomed the establishment of the Ministry of Women's Affairs in 2003 and reported that it was addressing violence against women as a cross-cutting issue in all of its programmes (Ibid., para. 62). The Ministry of Women's Affairs worked with the Ministry of the Interior to train police on women's rights and to create police stations that facilitate women's access. The Special Rapporteur noted that the Ministry has the potential to improve the situation of Palestinian women and promote and protect women's rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory if it

receives the necessary resources and support (Ibid., para. 63). Non-governmental organizations conducted community educational workshops in accordance with international standards on women's rights and monitored the criminal justice system's response to victims of violence (Ibid., para. 67).

10. The Special Rapporteur noted that the occupation permeated all aspects of life and entailed violations of economic, social and cultural rights (Ibid., para. 13) and reported a noticeable regression in terms of women's rights and fundamental freedoms (Ibid., para. 66). The death, imprisonment or unemployment of many adult male members of the community, which affected all areas of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, increased poverty and social tensions that contribute to increased domestic violence (Ibid., para. 48).

11. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967 reported that the occupation and the wall violated women's rights (A/60/271, para. 43). Palestinian women were routinely harassed, intimidated and abused at checkpoints and gates and were humiliated in front of their families and subjected to sexual violence by soldiers and settlers (Ibid.).

12. The Special Rapporteur also reported that approximately 120 Palestinian women were in prison, 11 of whom were in administrative detention — that is, being held without charge or trial. A total of 22 of the female prisoners were married and 18 were mothers (Ibid., p. 42).[6] Women prisoners were subjected to gender-based violence while under investigation and detention (A/60/271, para. 43). The conditions in prisons raised concerns about women's health and well-being (Ibid.).

13. The Special Rapporteur on adequate housing emphasized on several occasions the disproportionate effects of house demolitions on women, children and the elderly (E/CN.4/2005/72/Add.4, para. 28). House demolitions and the destruction of natural resources increased the economic and psychological burden on Palestinian women, who remained primarily responsible for running households and caring for family members.[7] Extra hours spent at checkpoints added to the time burden faced by women.[8]

14. Restriction of movement through closures continued to play a defining role in the lives of most Palestinians.[9] Drawing on the 2005 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics survey, ILO reported that 52.5 per cent of households cited the closure measures, 53.6 per cent cited military checkpoints and 16 per cent of households cited the wall as obstacles to accessing health services.[10] Some women had been forced to give birth at checkpoints after having been denied passage or while waiting to pass, which had led to maternal and infant deaths; others had not been able to reach medical facilities for pre- and post-natal care.[11] Information provided by UNRWA revealed that 15 pregnant women in 2004 and 8 in 2005 had experienced delays of 1 to 2.5 hours while being transported to hospital by ambulance (A/60/324, para. 6). The problem was more acute in rural areas, especially for women who lived in villages cut off by checkpoints from the cities where the hospitals were located (Ibid., para. 11).

15. At its thirty-third session in July 2005, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women reviewed the third periodic report of Israel (CEDAW/C/ISR/3) and expressed concern about the number of incidents at Israeli checkpoints which had had a negative impact on the rights of Palestinian women,

including the right of access to health-care services for pregnant women. The Committee called upon Israel to ensure that the authorities at all checkpoints were instructed to ensure access to health care for pregnant women, while protecting the security of Israel (A/60/38, paras. 257-258).

16. UNWRA reported that the social, economic and cultural context of women's health remained challenging during the period under review, as the Palestine refugee population had one of the highest birth rates in the region. The *Palestine Human Development Report* expressed concern about the high fertility rates in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which were attributed to social custom and tradition, both of which encouraged large families and early marriage for girls.[12] The report observed that fertility rates in the Palestinian territories were among the highest in the world.[13] Approximately one third of Palestine refugee women marry before the age of 18, and an equal proportion of women of reproductive age suffer from iron deficiency anaemia. The preliminary results of a study conducted by UNRWA revealed that over 36 per cent of pregnant women and over 43 per cent of nursing mothers in the Gaza Strip were anaemic (A/60/65-E/2005/13, para. 53). ESCWA reported that food insecurity had adversely affected women's health (Ibid., para. 53). A home visit programme conducted by the Ministry of Health found that the nutritional health status of women and children was affected by internal closure measures.[14]

17. UNICEF reported that although the overall health service coverage had been stable, the utilization and quality of maternal and child health services continued to be jeopardized. While 98 per cent of births were attended by skilled health staff and 96 per cent of pregnant women benefited from antenatal care, prematurity and low birth weight, related to the health and nutritional status of the mother and the quality of maternal and newborn health services, accounted for 41 per cent of infant deaths. That percentage was close to 46 per cent in the Gaza Strip.[15]

18. UNICEF also reported that preventive and curative maternal and child health services and health promotion activities were disrupted by the current conflict, resulting in decreased essential care for women and children. Only 42 per cent of mothers who delivered in hospitals over the past five years had received health education on key maternal and infant health topics, such as breastfeeding, maternal nutrition and family planning. Neonatal mortality played a role in the stagnation or aggravation of the infant and under-five mortality rates among Palestinian children.

19. Women's access to decision-making remained limited.[16] The *Palestine Human Development Report* revealed that female representation in ministries, parties and community organizations was still very limited. An indication of the low levels of political participation of Palestinian women was demonstrated by the decreasing number of women in executive, legislative and local institutions. Female representation on the Palestinian National Council did not exceed 8 per cent, while the Legislative Council had only 5 women members out of a total of 88. Within the executive authority, the Cabinet included only 2 women ministers, while women represented only 12.5 per cent of the 250 directors general appointed in various ministries. In municipal and local councils, the percentage of women had never exceeded 1 per cent until the elections held in late 2004, when it rose to 17 per cent.[17]

20. For the first time in 28 years, positive developments were, however, noted in the first round of multiparty local elections held in December 2004 and January

2005. There was a record participation of women, both as candidates and as voters. As a result of legislation establishing quotas, there should be at least two women in each council.[18] According to the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, women's groups had called for quotas for women candidates in the elections — 30 per cent for local council elections and 20 per cent for the legislative council. ILO reported that there had been some debate around women's candidatures. However, a number of Palestinian organizations, in addition to the Ministry of Women's Affairs, have supported the idea.[19]

21. Poverty remained widespread in the occupied territories.[20] Approximately 11 per cent of all Palestinian families living below the poverty line in Palestine were headed by women, and the overall percentage of poor families headed by women was greater than that of poor families headed by men.[21] The *Palestine Human Development Report* observed that there was a close relationship between female poverty in Palestinian society and the nature of the male-dominated job market. Horizontal and vertical segregation between women and men had a negative effect on women, especially those living below the poverty line.[22]

22. The participation of women in the labour force remained low.[23] In the third quarter of 2004, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics labour force survey reported the unemployment rate as 27.4 per cent for men and 23.1 per cent for women. ILO noted that the working patterns of women and men were highly differentiated in the occupied territories. More women than men were studying. However, only 1 woman in 10 of working age was employed.[24] With regard to wages, the hourly wages of women were above those of men in agriculture and in services but below those of men in manufacturing and in commerce, hotels and restaurants.[25]

23. ILO reported that one in three young persons aged 15-24 and over half of those aged 25-29 were in forced idleness, which reinforced the exceptional circumstances prevailing in the occupied territories.[26] ILO stated that the situation required urgent attention in the form of significant assistance in vocational training, business development and employment orientation specifically directed at young women and men. Young women and men also faced numerous constraints in mobility within the territories and in accessing employment in Israel or in the industrial estates.[27]

24. The proportion of women in part-time work was significantly higher than that of men: 40 per cent for women compared to 17 per cent for men. ILO noted that this might be a factor in the very moderate real wage increases registered in 2004 and might also explain why 27 per cent of workers earned less than the average wage and less than the minimum wage.[28] A number of work permits for business people had been issued, although utilization had been low. The photographic control of women and men workers at checkpoints through the use of customized screening machines was perceived by Palestinians as an example of indecent working conditions, a health hazard and a humiliation.[29]

25. For the period under review, the Ministry of Women's Affairs took measures to further the political, economic and social empowerment of women.[30] It established good working relations with other ministries and collaborated on gender mainstreaming initiatives. Efforts were made, for example, to mainstream gender perspectives in the social security policy, with the assistance of ILO. Examples of good practices were also disseminated in order to develop a gender-responsive budgeting process.[31]

III. Assistance to Palestinian women

Economic activities

26. The World Bank reported on an improved targeting scheme of the Social Safety Net Reform Project, which would enable poor adult women living on their own because of separation, divorce or widowhood to receive cash assistance from the special hardship case programme.

27. IFAD reported on phases I and II of its rehabilitation and development programme. IFAD mobilized $10 million towards phase II, aimed at restoring access to essential services and social and physical infrastructure in Gaza and the West Bank and providing immediate income through the provision of employment in infrastructure rehabilitation and expansion; and promoting opportunities for the target group to access resources needed to improve their income-earning opportunities. Specific initiatives targeting poor rural women were included in the programme, such as two community centres (in Azzoun and Jayyous villages), under the savings and credit associations which serve the financial and social needs of women in the area. The community centre for the Women's Rural Development Society was opened to provide training courses to meet the financial needs of women. In addition, a rural credit component, implemented in cooperation with the Arab Bank, continued to provide direct financing to rural women to set up and/or expand their small income-generation activities. Since the beginning of the project, a total of 340 women's income-generating activity loans were made, amounting to $950,300. The repayment rate for women's loans was reported by the Arab Bank as 96 per cent, as of 31 March 2005.

28. UNRWA continued its microcredit community support programme to promote the socio-economic status and self-reliance of the most vulnerable among the refugees, including women. The microcredit community support programme issued more than $1.87 million in loans to a mix of low-income families and small entrepreneurs, including women. Furthermore, UNRWA reported granting 4,719 loans valued at $2.93 million to women through its microfinance and micro-entrepreneurship programme.

29. UN-Habitat introduced a housing and income-generating programme for widows and underprivileged women in Hebron, with an initial funding of $6.2 million. The objectives of the project are to foster self-reliance by facilitating the transition from welfare to gainful employment, promoting the local economy and contributing to poverty alleviation through job creation. The initial phase of the project aimed at supporting 100 female-headed households in Hebron municipality through the provision of shelter and opportunities to engage in income-generating activities.

30. UNDP reported on the establishment of eight centres for the empowerment of community women. Within the framework of the community centres activation project, those centres were established in collaboration with UNIFEM and a Young Men's Christian Association women's training programme. The establishment of the centres (2 in the north of the West Bank and 6 in southern West Bank) have contributed to job creation and enhanced women's access to services and resources. In addition, UNDP, with support from the United States Agency for International Development, established a rural women's empowerment centre in the northern West Bank village of Shufa. Educational and economic empowerment programmes

were initiated in partnership with the municipality and with the technical support of UNIFEM. In order to enhance girls' access to education, approximately eight schools for girls were constructed, extended or rehabilitated, including upgraded sanitary facilities, in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

31. Empowering Palestinian women and fostering their contribution to economic development was among the main objectives of the UNCTAD integrated capacity-building programme. The project for promoting the development of small- and medium-sized enterprises sought to foster individual entrepreneurial capabilities and build institutional capacity for establishing a dynamic private sector and internationally competitive small- and medium-sized enterprises. Women were encouraged to join the programme through targeted promotional activities, including seminars and print advertisements. Moreover, the project stipulated that at least 30 per cent of participants in the initial achievement motivation workshop, the Entrepreneurship Training Workshop, should be women. To date, the programme had attracted 17 women out of 61 entrepreneurs. They included promising women entrepreneurs, including the owners/managers of existing enterprises, and those who were willing to start their own businesses.

32. UNIDO activities in Palestine aimed at building the capacity of the Ministry of Industry and the Private Sector to promote and foster the sustainable development of the Palestinian industrial sector in terms of competitiveness, quality, productivity, export, partnership potential, contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP), as well as the creation of sustainable employment and income-generating opportunities. Those activities, directly or indirectly, benefited Palestinian women.

Humanitarian assistance

33. UNRWA provided essential educational, health, relief and social services to over 4 million registered Palestine refugees in the Agency's five areas of operations: Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The Agency's assistance to Palestine refugee women focused on education and technical training, delivery of women-focused health services, social service support and the provision of microfinance. UNRWA also provided emergency assistance to the Palestinian refugees living in the Occupied Palestinian Territory to respond to the urgent needs generated by the ongoing crisis. The emergency appeal programmes focused on food aid, emergency employment creation, repair and reconstruction of the conflict-damaged infrastructure in kind and cash assistance, and mobile health clinics. The Agency created 2,037,886 days of temporary work under its direct-hire programme and community-based infrastructure and construction projects to help beneficiaries maintain minimum levels of income and support their families. In the Gaza Strip, approximately 20 per cent of the beneficiaries of the direct-hire component were female heads of households, while in West Bank, due to the nature of the work, around 12 per cent of the beneficiaries were women.

34. Through its socio-economic unit, UNSCO continued to monitor social and humanitarian indicators relating specifically to women, such as access to health-care services, and the incidence of childbirth at roadblocks and checkpoints. This information has been shared for use in the reports of key partners, such as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. UNSCO also undertook a comprehensive study of the impact of economic fragmentation on rural communities in the West Bank, highlighting the specific effect of closures on women.

35. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs coordinated the response of United Nations agencies and other humanitarian bodies in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The Consolidated Appeals Process included four themes: fragmentation; impoverishment; acute crisis areas; and protection of civilians. Gender-based projects were integrated into the Consolidated Appeals Process and the Common Humanitarian Action Plan to address the impact of the humanitarian crisis on women.

36. UNHCR reported on programme activities that were designed to ensure the participation and empowerment of refugee women in decision-making. Of the 8,873 Palestinian refugees registered in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, approximately 4,000 were women. UNHCR assisted 2,274 refugees. Refugee women had access to material assistance, counselling and medical support through UNHCR implementing partners. Refugee women in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya continued to benefit from the job placement activities, microcredit project schemes and job-oriented and vocational training of UNHCR.

37. The WFP office in the Occupied Palestinian Territory achieved significant progress in advocating the role of Palestinian women in management and access to food assistance and participation in food-for-work and food-for-training activities, implemented in partnership with key organizations and ministries working closely with women. Some food-for-training courses included gender sensitization, introduction to HIV/AIDS awareness and women's human rights. Women were encouraged to personally receive their food entitlement or were authorized to designate another person to collect the rations on their behalf.

Education and training

38. The World Bank reported on a tertiary education project ($10 million) that aimed to strengthen the capacity of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and to provide support to higher education institutions to improve their management and the quality and relevance of programmes. During the period under review, the Development Grant Facility supported the Centre of Arab Women for Training and Research in its regional research work on Arab women and decision-making, which includes a Palestinian national research team.

39. Education programmes continued to be one of the primary means by which UNRWA promoted the development of girls and women. In the 2004/05 academic year, some 489,000 pupils, half of them girls, were enrolled in the Agency's elementary, preparatory and secondary schools. More than half of the Agency's teachers were women, as were 67 per cent of the 1,170 participants in pre-service teacher training courses. UNRWA administered 110 scholarships for Palestinian women in Lebanon and other scholarship projects for approximately 70 female refugees. The UNRWA Department of Education, in collaboration with UNIFEM, continued to assist Palestine refugee women in acquiring modern technological skills. The project emphasized equal access to information and communication technologies (ICT) by Palestine refugee women as well as men, encouraged gender equality in recruitment and retention policies, and built capacity to produce appropriate information content for Palestine refugee women to assist them to fulfil their socio-economic, reproductive and community roles. UNRWA also promoted community participation by and community services for Palestine refugee women through 65 women's programme centres. Activities included occupational training

programmes, kindergartens and nurseries. Over 133,450 refugees, mainly women and children, benefited from these services.

40. UNICEF provided 40,000 children in areas affected by violence, deteriorating economic conditions and closures with remedial worksheets, school bags and stationary, as well as basic clothing. A total of 904 school-in-a-box kits were purchased, of which 375 were distributed to schools in Gaza. The rest were pre-positioned to the West Bank in order to provide emergency response in the districts of Nablus and Hebron. The kits assisted about 70,000 students to continue their education during closures. UNICEF also piloted the child-friendly school concept in 100 schools in Gaza and the West Bank. In addition to ensuring that physical school conditions were more child-friendly, especially for girls, the project trained approximately 850 schoolteachers on child-centred pedagogy and participatory school and classroom processes. The participation of adolescent girls in year-round sports programmes, including summer recreational activities, was realized. Out of a total of more than 6,000 adolescents, 3,250 females participated in weekly sports programmes aimed at relieving stress and the damaging effects of violence.

41. UNESCO provided policy and planning advice and other capacity-building assistance to the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. By supporting the provision of gender-responsive educational services, including guidance and counselling for school-age girls, teacher training and the production of learning materials, UNESCO focused on eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education in the Palestinian territories. In collaboration with UNIFEM and the Ministry of Women's Affairs, UNESCO developed training in the areas of vocational counselling and guidance for girls in grades 8 to 12; academic assistance; and workshops for parents to raise their awareness of the importance of education for girls.

42. The Division for Palestinian Rights of the Department of Political Affairs reported that one of three trainees from the Palestinian Authority in the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority was a woman.

43. UNFPA organized training at the Ministry of Women's Affairs to improve mainstreaming of gender perspectives in the planning process and monitoring of progress through the development, testing and use of gender analysis tools, including for gender audits. Training was also provided for women newly elected to municipalities and focused on developing capacities for advocacy and mobilization of communities in local development, particularly women.

44. UN-Habitat supported a technical and vocational training centre for underprivileged women in the southern area of the Gaza Strip, with an initial funding of $2 million. There were previously only two such training centres for women in the northern and central areas of the Gaza Strip, and women's enrolment in vocational, industrial and commercial training schools and institutes was marginal. The proposed centre for the southern area of the Gaza Strip targeted women who were registered as hardship cases with the Ministry of Social Affairs. The project aimed at empowering women who were the poorest of the poor, without income, or who were socially marginalized as divorcees, widows and heads of households.

45. OHCHR organized training courses for different target groups, including Palestinian police forces and prison personnel, judges and workers in the

development field, taking into consideration gender balance in the selection of participants and integrating women's issues into all training activities. Training curricula and programmes included sessions on women's rights. In addition, OHCHR worked closely with the Palestinian Ministry of Women's Affairs to carry out training sessions for Ministry staff.

Health

46. In order to address the challenges of high fertility rates and promote the health status of Palestine refugee women, UNRWA continued providing maternal and child health-care and reproductive health services as an integral part of its primary health care. A total of 85,737 women received antenatal care in five fields of operation of the Agency. In addition, 20,088 new women sought family planning guidance. The total number of continuing users was 104,803. UNRWA also sustained full immunization coverage of women and children against vaccine-preventable diseases. Those services were supported by school health services, the provision of iron supplements for women throughout pregnancy and post delivery, and health education programmes on the prevention of tobacco use and the prevention of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases.

47. WHO reported on a project to strengthen the nutrition department of the Ministry of Health and establish a national nutrition surveillance system. The project assisted the development of a nutrition department, improved the technical capacity of relevant personnel, developed nutrition-related policy documents and plans of action, and supported training and research on improving nutritional services, particularly for women and children. The project benefited women by strengthening nutrition surveillance systems and coordinating nutrition activities through thematic groups and nutrition service delivery, particularly for women.

48. UNFPA reported on a capacity-building programme to support the Ministry of Health that focused on improving the quality of services and expanding the scope of the reproductive health package to include early detection of the most common cancers among women (breast and cervical cancer), in addition to ante- and post-natal and family planning counselling, management of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and reproductive tract infections, and health education. Guidelines and protocols for reproductive health services were developed for hospitals and primary health centres. Special attention was paid to the prevention of HIV/AIDS and STIs through the STIs/HIV/AIDS management/provider's manual and training of health providers. In addition, UNFPA designed a programme to train health providers, general practitioners, midwives, nurses and community health workers to reach 10,000 pregnant women and 50,000 people who reside in 100 selected localities. Moreover, a training workshop addressed different reproductive health issues, including gender-based violence, counselling skills, family planning and reproductive rights.

49. In preparation for the disengagement operations in the northern West Bank and Gaza Strip, UNICEF provided critical supplies for mothers and children in the form of emergency health kits, midwifery and obstetric kits, and family water kits, raised community awareness on appropriate hygiene practices and promoted breastfeeding. In areas where access to health facilities was difficult, support was provided to such facilities, together with the upgrade of the skills of health-care workers. UNICEF also provided vaccines and vaccine-related supplies to cover 100 per cent of

Palestinian children and women of child-bearing age for the immunization services provided by the Ministry of Health, UNRWA and non-governmental organizations. UNICEF initiated a pilot project aimed at promoting awareness of HIV/AIDS among adolescent girls and boys.

50. The UNAIDS secretariat supported the participation of seven representatives from the Occupied Palestinian Territory national AIDS committee, medical relief committees and the Culture and Free Thought Association in the UNAIDS regional meeting on the theme "Women, girls and HIV/AIDS", held in Amman in February 2005.

Women's human rights, including violence against women

51. UNICEF equipped mothers with the basic skills to detect distress among their children and to respond to it, as well as to deal with their own stress. Groups of mothers were formed in the areas most affected by violence and movement restrictions, such as those in the proximity of settlements or the wall. Each group attended a series of 12 sessions, addressing issues such as child developmental stages, child rights, psychosocial well-being, and the negative impact of early marriage and domestic violence and abuse. More than 15,000 caregivers, the majority of whom were mothers, attended such sessions.

52. In support of the right to due process, UNICEF provided legal aid for girls as well as boys. UNICEF also set up a monitoring system which gathered data on, inter alia, charges, sentencing, pre-trial detention and age and geographic location. The situation of children in detention was monitored and legal aid was provided.

53. OHCHR continued to support the Palestinian National Authority through a project on the rule of law. The project had a positive impact on women's rights by addressing specific problems of discrimination and domestic injustices, including by vetting national laws for adherence to international human rights standards and norms. The project also sought to empower women to know and claim their rights. On 3 March, OHCHR participated in a workshop organized by the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme and the Women's Empowerment Programme on women's political participation in Gaza City, involving activists from civil society and the governmental sector. It was also involved in a meeting in Gaza for approximately 70 women in a marginalized area of Gaza City organized by the Palestinian Working Women's Society for Development, which focused on women's rights, including women's participation in political life, in the context of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and other human rights instruments.

54. As part of efforts to implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), UNFPA provided support to Palestinian women to produce a lexicon for advocacy purposes. Such support was undertaken in a participatory manner, together with the Coalition Combating Violence against Women and other governmental institutions, to promote national consensus on terminology on major issues related to gender-based violence. The lexicon also promoted examples of best practices from each of the institutions. UNFPA, together with the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy, implemented advocacy activities on sensitizing legislators, decision-makers and community leaders on the negative effects of early marriage on the development of Palestinian society.

55. UNIFEM negotiated an agreement with the Ministry of Women's Affairs to initiate a national programme on women's rights, with focus on femicide.

Advocacy

56. In organizing international meetings and conferences for, and under the guidance of, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Department of Political Affairs has included items dealing with the situation of Palestinian women and ensured the participation of women's organizations and women representatives of other civil society organizations. The meetings focused on the legal aspects of the question of Palestine in light of the 2004 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legal consequences of the construction of the wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.[32] The hardship caused by the wall for Palestinian women through limiting their access to places of work and worship, schools, hospitals and community services formed part of the deliberations. Renowned women lawyers, and women activists from civil society organizations working in the field of law, were among the panellists guiding the discussions.

57. The Department of Public Information carried out a special information programme on the question of Palestine, in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 59/30 of 1 December 2004, aimed at sensitizing public opinion. Working in close cooperation with the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Department of Political Affairs, and through it with the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Department used a variety of means to inform the public and reach out to the media and civil society. The United Nations News Centre continued its coverage of developments related to the situation in the Occupied Territories and its effect on Palestinian women. Various United Nations activities, statements and documents related to the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women were also highlighted through a special "News Focus: Middle East" page featured on the United Nations News Centre. The Department of Public Information issued 18 press releases (9 each in French and English) dealing specifically with assistance to Palestinian women.

58. United Nations in Action series of UNTV featured a programme on microcredit schemes for Palestinian women, which highlighted the role of UNRWA.[33] In its daily news programmes and current affairs magazines for worldwide and regional dissemination, United Nations Radio covered, inter alia, the report of a round-table discussion with three Palestinian women representing non-governmental organizations to CEDAW held during its March 2005 session; the report on the struggle for equality of Palestinian women living in Israel 10 years after Beijing; the affirmation by CEDAW of the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories according to a report introduced by Palestinian Women; the report introduced by the Arab Women in Israel to CEDAW on Israeli discrimination against Arab women in Israel; a report on a delegation of Palestinian Women who travelled to New York to participate in Beijing+10; and a report on cooperation between the Palestinian Ministry of Women Affairs and the World Bank.

59. ESCWA provided technical assistance to the Palestinian National Authority Ministry of Women's Affairs for building the capacities of its Advocacy, Media and Communications Department. Three training workshops were conducted for

Ministry staff on addressing gender issues in plans and programmes of other ministries and to improve their use of data and statistics for lobbying and advocacy. The ESCWA Centre for Women developed an interactive website to include country profiles on Arab women, including Palestinian women. Those profiles are updated on a regular basis to reflect the latest developments in population dynamics, health, poverty, education, human rights, conflict, labour, political participation and leadership and the work of the national machinery and non-governmental organizations.

60. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs chaired the inter-agency advocacy group, which includes members of the key United Nations humanitarian agencies operating in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. During 2005, the Office initiated a group activity on the occasion of International Women's Day on 8 March. The inter-agency advocacy group published a press release entitled "Towards a more secure future: United Nations agencies operating in the Occupied Palestinian Territory call for action in improving the situation of Palestinian women". Signed by 10 agencies, the press release was sent to the local media and received good coverage.

61. The Division for Palestinian Rights of the Department of Political Affairs updated its documents collection under the subject category "Women" in the Internet-based United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL) and electronic links to relevant websites outside UNISPAL. The special web address permitting external websites to link to the UNISPAL subject category on Palestinian women on an ongoing basis was also maintained.

62. In terms of its publications programme, the Division for Palestinian Rights included information on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women, as available, in its monthly monitoring publications *Chronological Review of Events Relating to the Question of Palestine* and *Monthly Bulletin*, which review action taken by the United Nations system and intergovernmental organizations relevant to the question of Palestine, as well as other publications.

Institutional arrangements

63. UNDP supported the newly established Ministry of Women's Affairs in the development of a three-year strategic action plan whose central objective was the empowerment of and support to Palestinian women to actively participate in building and developing a democratic Palestinian state. Since June 2005, the gender mainstreaming capacity of the Ministry and newly created gender units of various line Ministries has been increased in order to provide decision makers with the needed skills and knowledge to operationalize their commitment to gender equality and women's rights.

64. The ESCWA Centre for Women sponsored technical assistance activities and advisory services on institution-building in the Ministry of Women's Affairs, concentrating on the formulation of the Ministry's strategy and policy document. Advisory services were also provided to enhance the technical cooperation programme of the poverty alleviation department of the Ministry. Capacity-building training workshops were organized and conducted for Ministry officials.

65. The Transfer of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals and the UNV programmes continued to support the ongoing efforts of UNDP, UNIFEM and the Ministry of Women's Affairs to ensure that gender issues were mainstreamed in all policies and reflected in all programmes. In this regard, UNV supported the institutionalization process within the newly established Ministry of Women's Affairs through the provision of gender training, an ICT unit and support to the development of a website for Palestinian women to meet and share experiences.

66. In response to a joint request from Palestinian and Israeli women leaders and activists, UNIFEM convened and facilitated a strategy and planning meeting from 26 to 28 July 2005 in Istanbul, Turkey. The purpose of the meeting was to develop and advance a plan to establish an international women's commission for a just and sustainable Israeli-Palestinian peace. The Commission was established in the context of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and other international conventions and instruments that call upon States parties to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict. The Commission brought together Palestinian, Israeli and international women dedicated to end the Israeli occupation and bring about a just peace based on international law, human rights and equality. The Commission worked for an ongoing and comprehensive reconciliation in order to realize a mutually secure and sustainable peace and co-existence within the context of mainstream negotiations.

IV. Conclusion and recommendations

67. **During the reporting period, the impact of the conflict continued to adversely affect women in all spheres of life. Women and their families lived in a permanent state of insecurity, tension and fear (E/CN.4/2005/72/Add.4, para. 74). They were negatively affected by the restrictions on movement, the deteriorating economic conditions, poverty and lack of access to health care and health services. Palestinian women continued to bear the combined burdens of occupation and patriarchy which have deepened their inequality and denied them the possibility for enjoyment of rights, fundamental freedoms and liberty (Ibid., para. 72).**

68. **The outcome document of the 2005 World Summit highlighted the importance of eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls. The important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding was also highlighted. Member States reaffirmed their commitment to the full and effective implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security. In this regard, it is important that Palestinian women are fully involved in all conflict resolution and peacebuilding initiatives, including at decision-making levels. Taking into account that women tend to suffer disproportionately during times of political unrest and instability, there is a need to mainstream gender perspectives in policies and programmes to ensure that the contribution, priorities and needs of both women and men are addressed.**

69. **Entities of the United Nations have continued to make efforts to improve the situation of Palestinian women. Member States, entities of the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and other relevant institutions**

should intensify their efforts to provide financial and technical assistance to Palestinian women.

70. **The Commission may wish to encourage entities of the United Nations system to increase the participation of women in all assistance activities in order to fully integrate women's priorities and needs in the development process, for example, through increasing women's involvement in poverty-reduction programmes.**

71. **The newly established Ministry of Women's Affairs has undertaken important initiatives to promote gender mainstreaming in all ministries. United Nations entities and other international organizations should continue to coordinate and collaborate to provide financial, advisory and technical assistance to the Ministry and to gender units in line ministries to ensure that gender perspectives are identified and addressed in policies and programmes in all policy areas.**

Notes

[1] The contribution of UNICEF to the preparation of the present report.

[2] UNICEF input to the preparation of the report.

[3] The *Palestine Human Development Report 2004* was prepared by the Birzeit University, Development Studies Programme, with support from the United Nations Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People and in association with the Ministry of Planning.

[4] See *Palestine Human Development Report 2004*.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] International Labour Organization, "Report of the Director-General on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories" (Geneva, 2005) para. 31.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., para. 17.

[10] Ibid., para. 19.

[11] Ibid., para. 19.

[12] *Palestine Human Development Report 2004*.

[13] Ibid.

[14] International Labour Organization, op. cit., para. 20.

[15] UNICEF input to the preparation of the present report.

[16] See *Palestine Human Development Report 2004*.

[17] Ibid.

[18] International Labour Organization, op. cit., para. 10.

[19] Ibid., para. 10.

[20] Ibid., preface.

[21] See *Palestine Human Development Report 2004*.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] International Labour Organization, op. cit., para. 63.

[25] Ibid., para. 80.

[26] Ibid., preface.

[27] Ibid., preface.

[28] Ibid., para. 88.

[29] Ibid., para. 24.

[30] Ibid., para. 14.

[31] Ibid., para. 14.

[32] United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine, United Nations Office at Geneva, 8 and 9 March 2005; United Nations International Conference of Civil Society in Support of Middle East Peace, UNESCO headquarters, Paris, 12 and 13 July 2005.

[33] The programme was aired on CNN International in January 2005.